

First Words

A First Steps Communications Tool for Families From Family to Family

Developmental Therapy— What is it and Why Would my Child Need it?

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Alphabet Soup

Each month we will cover a few abbreviations or acronyms parents might hear while in First Steps. Sometimes it is awkward for families to ask. Do you know these?

- **AT= Assistive Technology**

Assistive technology is any item or piece of equipment that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

- **PA= Prior Approval**

Advance review and approval for a specific item or service included on an IFSP.

Developmental Therapy is one of the sixteen services provided by First Steps and one of the most widely used by families. Where a physical therapist concentrates on gross motor development and an occupational therapist concentrates on fine motor development, a developmental therapist (DT) is a specialist who looks at the whole child and the impact of all areas of the child’s development in relationship to family, caregivers and his environment. The DT works with other providers and supports the child’s cognitive and social emotional development and how it coordinates with language and motor development. S/he watches how all areas of development impact your child’s ability to learn and participate in your family routines.

The fully credentialed developmental therapist has a bachelor’s or master’s degree in special education, elementary education, early childhood education, child development or a related field and has twelve months of supervised early intervention experience. A developmental therapy associate has an associate’s degree in child

development, early childhood education or has an equivalent field-based training. They will provide the same services, but will be directly supervised by a credentialed DT.

A developmental therapist understands the implications of disability or developmental delay upon the normal progression of development. They know how to work with families and work closely with other disciplines (OT, PT, speech, etc.) to ensure that comprehensive services are provided. Probably the most important service a DT can offer is to offer the family suggestions of how to coordinate the services of the other providers into activities that can support the development of skills. These activities will involve play and every day tasks that can be incorporated into daily living. The developmental therapist can be a integral part of your First Steps team and your child’s progression through developmental milestones.

For additional information regarding the role of your DT check out http://www.in.gov/fssa/first_step/pdf/DTRolesWeb.pdf.

Choosing Developmentally Appropriate Toys

Ready or not, holiday time is quickly approaching and many of us will be toy shopping for our kids, and/or offering suggestions to grandparents and others who want to buy for our kids. This can be challenging when you're shopping for a child with a developmental delay or disability. Fortunately, there are resources available to help you come up with some good ideas to ensure you choose a developmentally appropriate toy. Lekotek, an organization that is a central source of information on toys and play for children with special needs, developed a list of tips for choosing toys. Issues addressed on the list include: multi-sensory appeal, method of activation, places the toy will be used, opportunities for success, current popularity, self-expression, adjustability, child's individual abilities, safety and durability, and potential for interaction. You can find the list of tips, as well as,

information about a toy resource hotline at the Lekotek website (<http://www.lekotek.org>).

Lekotek has also teamed up with Toys 'R Us to develop a toy guide for differently abled children. The guide strives to help find the right fit between a child's abilities and stimulating toys to help promote development. Symbols are used to depict different developmental areas such as auditory, creativity, fine motor, gross motor and language (there are actually ten areas in all!). The symbols make it easy for anyone to choose a toy that will compliment a child's budding abilities! You can find a link to the guide at Lekotek's website, as well. Finally, and most importantly, make sure the toys you select are fun. After all, a child isn't going to benefit from the toy if it isn't fun to play with. Happy shopping and have a wonderful holiday season!!

Advocacy Tip of the Month

Do you feel like you've lost control of your weekly schedule? Ever feel like therapy is the driving factor in your life? This is a common challenge for families when they find out their child has delays and will benefit from early intervention. As parents, we naturally want to do everything possible to give our children what they need to be successful. Sometimes when children are eligible for a variety of therapy services, our family schedules become so packed with therapy and appointments that we don't have time to just be with our kids to play or to spend time together as a family.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your weekly schedule, talk to your service coordinator and other members of your First Steps team. There may be ways to reduce some of your services to create more free time without compromising goals. It's okay to say no to a service or to ask for other ways to achieve IFSP goals. First Steps services should be an enhancement to your child and family, not an added source of stress. More is not always better. Setting limits is a parenting decision only you can make.

Resources for Families and Providers

Check out these resources for developmentally appropriate toys and toy adaptations:

Family Place in Cyberspace
<http://www.ataccess.org/resources/fpic/default.html>

Let's Play Project
<http://letsplay.buffalo.edu>

The Oppenheim Toy Portfolio
<http://www.toyportfolio.com/Platinum/SnapHome.asp>

Beyond Play
<http://www.beyondplay.com/index.htm>

Able Baby Company
<http://www.ablebaby.com>